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ABSTRACT

An evaluation was done of New York City Public Schools' program ADVANCE (Adolescents Developing Valuable and Necessary Channels of Esteem), a U.S. Department of Education funded project that provided support to adolescents in Tier II transitional housing in Brooklyn (New York). Tier II housing provides temporary living space and on-site social services for homeless persons who have been living in shelters and have not yet been assigned to permanent housing. The program, designed to augment Tier II services, provided educational referrals, a learning center, cultural activities, and parent workshops to all community members who wished to participate from February 1, 1991, to September 30, 1991. Seventy-one adolescents and adults participated in some or all of the activities. Evaluation data were collected via a roster indicating demographic characteristics of students, pretest and posttest reading scores, educational status, number of educational referrals, and participation in project activities. Staff also administered a pretest and posttest questionnaire assessing parents' involvement in their children's education and interviewed key project workers at the site. The analysis of the data found that the project reached or surpassed its objectives in number of participants, enrollment of participants in educational institutions, and passing rate on the General Education Diploma examination. (JB)

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OREA Report

PROJECT ADVANCE
1991

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The United States Department of Education funded Project ADVANCE (Adolescents Developing Valuable and Necessary Channels of Esteem) to provide support for adolescents in Tier II transitional housing.

Project ADVANCE was located at American Red Cross/HELP I in Brooklyn, New York from February 1, 1991 through September 30, 1991. The Career Education Center of the New York City Public Schools' Alternative High School Superintendency administered the program. The program provided educational referrals, a learning center (including General Education Diploma classes, English as a Second Language classes, and literacy classes), cultural activities, and parent workshops to all community members who wished to participate.

Seventy-one adolescents and adults participated in some or all of the activities provided by the program. The program reached or surpassed its objectives in number of participants, enrollment of participants in educational institutions, and pass rate on the General Education Diploma exam.

The recommendations in the report are the following:

- To encourage maximum utilization, the learning center should be allotted space at a time convenient to to the participants, to the extent possible.
- The program staff should explore ways of expanding day-care services to children of learning center students so that the students can concentrate on their schoolwork while in class.
- Program personnel should make provisions to administer posttest forms to the participants who leave the program before the end of the project period, to maximize the accuracy and completeness of data.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Office of Research, Evaluation, and Assessment's High School Evaluation Unit (OREA/H.S.E.U.) prepared this report under the supervision of Dr. Lori Mei. Thanks are due to Mabel Payne for direction and coordination, and to Dr. Linda Solomon for data analysis and production of the report.

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I. INTRODUCTION

PROGRAM BACKGROUND

The New York City Public Schools' Division of High Schools received funding from the United States Department of Education to implement and evaluate Project ADVANCE (Adolescents Developing Valuable and Necessary Channels of Esteem). Project ADVANCE was designed to provide support for homeless students in grades nine through 12 and between the ages of 14 and 21 living in Tier II transitional housing.

Tier II transitional housing provides temporary living space and on-site social services, such as caseworkers and daycare, for homeless persons who have been living in shelters and have not yet been assigned to permanent housing. Project ADVANCE was designed to augment the Tier II transitional housing services, providing educational referrals, a learning center, cultural activities, and parent workshops.

Project ADVANCE was located at American Red Cross/HELP I (a Tier II transitional housing site in Brooklyn, New York) from February 1, 1991 through September 30, 1991. The Career Education Center (C.E.C.), a subunit of the New York City Public Schools' Alternative High School Superintendency, administered the project.

EVALUATION OBJECTIVES

Project administrators, in conjunction with New York City Public Schools' Office of Research, Evaluation and Assessment (OREA) staff, devised the following objectives to determine the project's achievements:

- The project coordinator will identify 40 program participants, assess their educational

needs, and produce a written statement of findings.

- Eighty percent of the program participants will attend at least two cultural activities organized by Project ADVANCE.
- Seventy percent of the program participants will improve in reading, as indicated by pre- and posttest results.
- Seventy percent of the program participants who are in General Education Diploma (G.E.D.) classes and eligible to take the test will pass the exam.
- Seventy percent of the program participants referred to educational institutions will enroll in an institution.
- Eighty percent of the parents who attend training workshop(s) will become more aware of parents' roles in their children's education and will improve their understanding of the requirements for obtaining a high school diploma from pre- to posttest, as indicated by an awareness questionnaire.
- A guide to replicating the program at additional sites will be developed by Project ADVANCE staff and disseminated to those who are interested in implementing similar programs.

EVALUATION METHODOLOGY

Project ADVANCE staff completed a roster indicating demographic characteristics of students, pre- and posttest reading scores (Informal Reading Inventory, 3rd Edition/Revised), educational status, number of educational referrals, and participation in project activities. Project staff also administered a pre- and posttest questionnaire assessing parents' involvement in their children's education. OREA staff analyzed data from the roster and questionnaire. In addition, OREA staff interviewed the project coordinator, the school psychologist, a teacher, a paraprofessional, and a senior neighborhood worker.

II. PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION

SITE

The program site was a Tier II transitional housing facility for approximately 190 families.

PERSONNEL

As a Tier II transitional housing facility, American Red Cross/HELP I provided individual caseworkers and daycare services to residents. Project ADVANCE personnel worked with American Red Cross/HELP I staff to establish a cooperative relationship and integrate Project ADVANCE and American Red Cross/HELP I services.

Project ADVANCE services included educational referrals, a learning center, cultural activities, and parent workshops. The Project ADVANCE project coordinator, a school psychologist, a senior neighborhood school worker, two teachers, and two paraprofessionals provided these services. In addition, Project ADVANCE paid some project participants to provide tutoring and clerical aid in the learning center as needed. An Advisory Council consisting of the principal and the executive assistant of C.E.C., three project participants, and a project paraprofessional aided in management of the project.

NEEDS ASSESSMENT

At the beginning of the project period, Project ADVANCE personnel completed a needs assessment, interviewing the director of American Red Cross/HELP I and interviewing and testing a sample of the residents. The assessment established a need for classes in basic skills (English and math), English as a Second

Language (E.S.L.), G.E.D., cultural awareness, and computer literacy. Project ADVANCE then staffed and organized the program in accordance with the findings and produced a written needs assessment report, thereby meeting the stipulation that the project coordinator would assess the educational needs of the program participants.

RECRUITMENT AND INTAKE

The Project ADVANCE senior neighborhood worker took major responsibility for recruiting participants for the program. He knocked on apartment doors, posted flyers, and contacted clients who had been referred to the program by their caseworkers. Program personnel conducted an intake interview of each participant, recording demographic characteristics, educational status, and pretest reading scores on the intake form.

PARTICIPANTS

The major goal of the project at its onset had been to provide support for the adolescent population of American Red Cross/HELP I. However, older residents also needing such Project ADVANCE services as literacy and E.S.L classes, were provided them. Thus, the project changed its focus to include the entire American Red Cross/HELP I community. In total, 39 adolescents (age 21 and under) and 32 adults enrolled as participants in Project ADVANCE, thereby surpassing the stipulation that the project would identify 40 participants. The 71 participants ranged in age from 16 to 56 years, and in grade level from three to twelve. Since the project took place in a transitional housing site, it was expected that most participants would not

enroll for the entire project period of eight months. This was, indeed, the case. Five (seven percent) of the participants remained in the project for its duration, whereas 29 (41 percent) of the participants remained in the project for two months or less.

EDUCATIONAL REFERRALS

Prior to the beginning of the project, alternative high school programs were available at American Red Cross/HELP I and some of the participants (N=26) were enrolled in these programs. However, other participants were not enrolled in any program either on- or off-site. For those who wished to continue their education in off-site educational settings, the Project ADVANCE school psychologist (aided by Board of Education attendance teachers) provided individual counseling and referrals to appropriate educational settings, primarily high schools or colleges in the neighborhood of American Red Cross/HELP I.

LEARNING CENTER

To serve participants who wished to continue their education on-site, two teachers, two paraprofessionals, parent aides, and student aides staffed an on-site learning center. The learning center shared space with other programs provided by American Red Cross/HELP I staff, sometimes creating scheduling problems. In addition, noise level was a problem in the large open space of the learning center, particularly since daycare services were insufficient and program participants often had to bring their young children to class with them.

Three programs took place at the learning center: G.E.D., E.S.L., and literacy classes. The three programs provided the following services:

- The G.E.D. classes accepted primarily participants aged 14 to 21 years. The classes met five days a week for four hours a day. Fifty-six participants attended these classes for varying lengths of time. Participants were divided into three groups, according to educational level, and were trained in the skills needed to pass the G.E.D. Participants who left American Red Cross/HELP I to move to permanent housing either returned to American Red Cross/HELP I for their classes or received referral to other G.E.D. sites.

- The E.S.L. classes accepted participants of any age. During the school term, classes met after school two days a week for one-and-a-half hours per session. During the summer, classes met two days a week for three hours per day. Participants received training in speaking and/or writing skills, as needed.

- The literacy classes also accepted participants of any age. During the school term, the classes met after school two days a week for one-and-a-half hours per session. During the summer, the classes met two days a week, three hours per day. Participants worked on exercises in basic reading, writing, and math skills, as needed.

A total of 69 participants participated in E.S.L. and/or literacy classes for varying lengths of time. In all three of the learning center programs, Project ADVANCE teaching staff maintained a folder for each student, and gave individual attention to the needs of each participant. Teaching staff also provided weekly reports to the American Red Cross/HELP I case workers who worked with each student, noting attendance, level of work, and problems. This allowed teachers and caseworkers to cooperate in encouraging students to take advantage of the services available from either Project ADVANCE or American Red Cross/HELP I.

CULTURAL ACTIVITIES

The Project ADVANCE coordinator and the psychologist organized one or more cultural events each month. The teachers and the neighborhood worker publicized the events and invited all residents of American Red Cross/HELP I who were interested in attending. Events took place during both day and evening hours. On-site events included speakers who were writers or community leaders; off-site events included trips to parks and theatres. The staff conducted discussions after each event to raise cultural awareness and improve the language skills of the participants.

PARENT WORKSHOPS

The Project ADVANCE coordinator and the psychologist also organized one or more two-hour parent workshops each month. Although Project ADVANCE personnel had originally intended to serve the teenage participants' parents with these workshops, the needs assessment report prompted broadened recruitment. Many of the teenage participants in Project ADVANCE were parents themselves, living with their young children, rather than with their parents. Moreover, other residents of American Red Cross/HELP I expressed an interest in the workshops. Accordingly, as they had with cultural events, Project ADVANCE personnel treated parent workshops as a community resource and invited all residents of American Red Cross/HELP I to attend. The workshops included presentations by guest speakers on several topics, including the rights of young people suspended from

school, sex education for children, and job interviews and sources of employment. In each case, workshop leaders provided the parents with brochures and referrals so that they could make further use of the information provided.

REPLICATION GUIDE

Project ADVANCE personnel did not produce a replication guide at the conclusion of the project, as planned. However, subsequent to the conclusion of the project period, the program was replicated at a number of sites.

III. PROGRAM OUTCOMES

Attendance lists maintained at the cultural events indicated that attendance at cultural events ranged from 21 to 42 residents of American Red Cross/HELP I. Only five (seven percent) of the Project ADVANCE participants attended two or more cultural events. Thus, the project did not meet the objective that 80 percent of the participants would attend at least two cultural activities. However, 25 (35 percent) of the participants attended one or more cultural events, and overall attendance at cultural events was sufficient to indicate that these events benefited the American Red Cross/HELP I community in general.

Of the 67 (94 percent) Project ADVANCE participants who completed both pre- and posttest reading tests (Informal Reading Inventory), 39 (58 percent) demonstrated posttest gains, while 28 (42 percent) showed no change. Consequently, the program came close to meeting but did not meet the objective that 70 percent of the participants would improve in reading level. The failure to meet the objective may have been due to the short period of time many of the participants spent in the program. This explanation was supported by a secondary analysis of the data. When the analysis included only the 49 participants who remained in the program for one month or longer, 34 (69 percent) of these participants demonstrated an improvement in their reading level. Moreover, the reading level of the group did improve somewhat on average, from a pretest mean of 7.4 to a posttest mean of 7.9, indicating a gain of 5 months.

Fifty-six participants took part in the G.E.D. classes for varying lengths of time. Nine of these participants took the G.E.D. exam at the end of the project period. Of the seven students for whom test results were known, five (71 percent) secured a passing grade. The project staff felt that the remaining students were not academically ready to take the test. Thus, the 71 percent pass rate surpassed the objective that 70 percent of the eligible G.E.D. students would pass the exam. This is a notable accomplishment given the limited duration of the project and transient nature of this population.

Participants who were not taking part in educational programs or who were seeking further educational services received referrals to on-site or off-site educational programs. In total, 56 participants received an average of one referral each to educational programs, and, at the time of their discharge from the American Red Cross/HELP I site, 35 (64 percent) were enrolled in an educational program. Thirteen (24 percent) were not enrolled in an educational program and the educational status of seven (13 percent) could not be identified. Excluding those whose educational status was unknown, 35 (73 percent) of those referred to programs were enrolled in a program at the time of their discharge from the American Red Cross/HELP I site. This surpassed the objective that 70 percent of those referred to educational institutions would enroll in an educational institution, again a notable achievement given the brevity of the project and the pre-existing problems of this population.

As noted above, participants in parent workshops included parents of teens in Project ADVANCE, teens who were themselves parents (primarily of infants or toddlers), and other residents of American Red Cross/HELP I. Attendance lists indicated that attendance at workshops ranged from 13 to 17. In all, 52 parents took part in a varying number of parent workshops. Of the 52 participants, 43 (83 percent) completed posttest parent questionnaires.

In general, respondents expressed satisfaction with the workshops that they attended. For example, of those who attended, 85 percent reported that they were satisfied with the job development workshops, and 80 percent said that they were satisfied with the G.E.D. and high school graduation requirements workshops. Moreover, they indicated that the workshops had been learning experiences for them. More than one-half of the respondents (ranging from 51 to 57 percent) indicated that they had learned about making an appeal if one's child has been suspended, keeping one's child in the original school while homeless, finding out if one's child has been attending school regularly, getting inexpensive children's books, writing a summary of a job history, filling out a job application, and finding information about job openings.

Of the 52 participants in the parent workshops, 41 (79 percent) completed both pretest and posttest parent questionnaires. Inspection of the data must take into account the fact that some of the participants who moved from American

Red Cross/HELP I to permanent housing did not complete the posttest questionnaire. Moreover, since most of the participants were parents of pre-school children (average age of the children was 3.6 years), the questions concerning their children's education were not immediately relevant to them.

Less than half of the parents saw themselves as more aware of and involved in their children's education. For example, 48 percent indicated that they felt more informed about parents' rights at schools, and 41 percent that they felt more informed about G.E.D. and high school graduation requirements. Thus, the project did not meet the evaluation objective that 80 percent of the parents would have a better understanding of parents' roles in their children's education and the requirements for obtaining a high school diploma.

IV. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Project ADVANCE exhibited a number of strengths. First, through referrals to off-site educational programs and the provision of on-site learning center programs, Project ADVANCE was able to meet the varied educational needs of homeless teens and other residents of the Tier II transitional housing site. It offered services suited to parents and to persons who did not have children, as well as to individuals who did not have basic academic skills or proficiency in English. Second, encouragement from the American Red Cross/HELP I caseworkers maximized the probability that each participant would attend classes and/or take advantage of other project services. Third, the inclusion of both day and evening cultural events and parent workshops extended the services to a wider range of participants than would otherwise have been the case. The cultural events and the parent workshops attracted both adolescent and older residents of American Red Cross/HELP I. Fourth, the project achieved or exceeded several evaluation objectives, specifically those concerning number of participants, G.E.D. pass rate, and post-project enrollment in educational programs.

The strengths of the project were evident despite the very real problems and obstacles. First, because residents of Tier II transitional housing are awaiting permanent housing, they are necessarily transient. Their participation in any program may be interrupted at any time. As noted above, the project compensated in one area by allowing relocated G.E.D. students to return to

American Red Cross/HELP I to continue G.E.D. classes. Second, the learning center shared space with programs provided by American Red Cross/HELP I staff. Scheduling was difficult and conditions were not always optimal to attract and keep students in the program. Third, on-site daycare was not sufficient to house children of all students in the G.E.D. classes. Hence, students often brought their young children to class, distracting both themselves and others.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- To encourage maximum utilization, the learning center should be allotted space at a time convenient to the participants, to the extent possible.
- Program staff should explore ways to expand daycare services to children of learning center students so that the students can concentrate on their schoolwork while in class.
- Program personnel should make provisions to administer posttest forms to the participants who leave the program before the end of the project period, to maximize the accuracy and completeness of the data.